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TWO SERMONS

PREACHED AT

THE CHAPEL ROYAL,

ST. JAMES'S.

By BEILBY PORTEUS, D.D.

RECTOR OF LAMBETH,

AND

CHAPLAIN IN ORDINARY TO HIS MAJESTY.

THE THIRD EDITION, CORRECTED.

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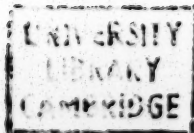
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TO THE
Q U E E N,

THESE SERMONS ARE,
WITH ALL POSSIBLE RESPECT AND HUMILITY,

I N S C R I B E D,

BY HER MAJESTY'S

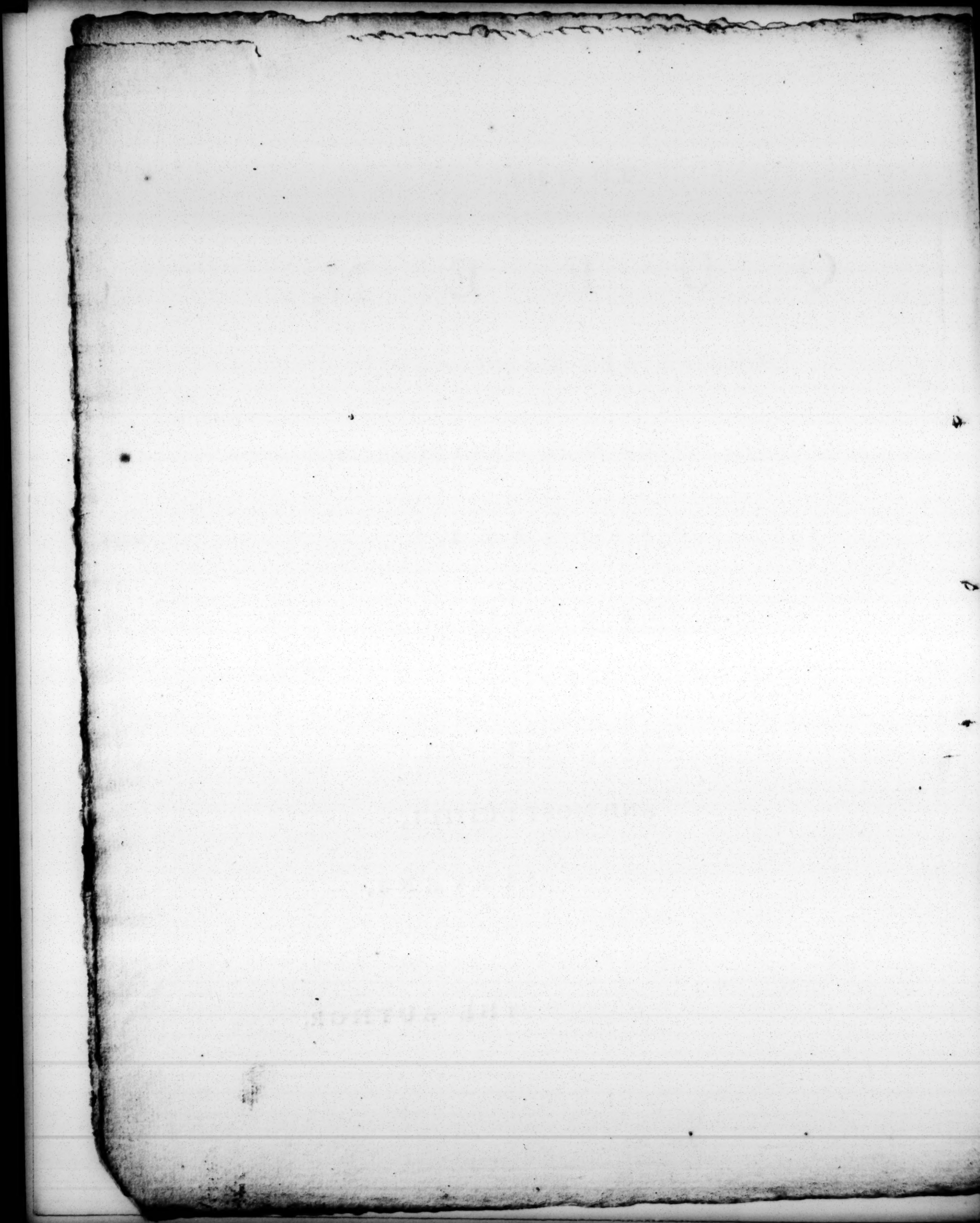
MOST OBEDIENT,

MOST FAITHFUL,

AND MOST DUTIFUL,

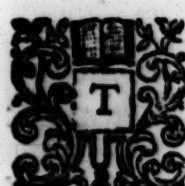
SERVANT,

THE AUTHOR.



2 T I M. iii. 4.

LOVERS OF PLEASURES MORE THAN LOVERS OF GOD.

 O what period of time, and to what particular persons, the sacred writer here alludes, it is neither easy nor material to determine. But there *is* a question which it is very material, and I doubt but too easy, for most of us to answer, whether the description in the text may not be justly applied to ourselves? In whatever sense we take the word PLEASURES, whether as denoting those which are in themselves criminal, or those which only become so by excess and abuse; it is surely doing us no injury to say, that we LOVE THEM MORE THAN GOD. At present I shall confine myself to that sort of pleasures, which is usually stiled innocent; and in a certain degree, and under proper restrictions undoubtedly is so; I mean the gayeties and amusements of life. If we are not lovers of *these* pleasures more than lovers of God; if our piety is greater than our dissipation, it must be great indeed. If we

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served

served our Maker with half that zeal, half that alacrity and perseverance, with which we pursue our amusements, we should be the most pious nation this day upon earth. But how far this is from being the case is but too apparent. It is not the LIVING GOD, it is PLEASURE that we worship. To this we are idolaters; to this we sacrifice our time, our talents, our fortunes, our health, and too often our innocence and peace of mind. In our haste to enjoy this life, we forget that there is another; we live (as the Apostle expresses it) WITHOUT GOD IN THE WORLD^a, and our endless engagements not only exclude all love but all thought of him. However carefully right principles of religion may have been originally planted in our breasts, they have no room to grow up. They are choked with the pleasures of this world, and bring no fruit to perfection. Invention seems to have been tortured to find out new ways of consuming time, and of being uselessly employed. And there has appear'd so wonderful an ingenuity in this respect, that it seems almost impossible for the wit of man to invent, or the life of man to admit, any further additions to this kind of luxury. There are thousands, even of those who would take it very ill to be called vicious, who yet from the time of their rising in the morning to the time of their going to rest at-night, never once bestow a single thought upon

^a Eph. ii. 12.

eternity;

eternity; nor, whilst they riot in the blessings of Providence, vouchsafe to cast one devout look up to the gracious author of them, in whom **THEY LIVE AND MOVE AND HAVE THEIR BEING** ^b.

Many, I know, would persuade themselves and others, that there can be no harm where there is no actual vice; and that provided they step not over the bounds of virtue, they cannot be guilty of an excess in pleasure.

But is it true in the first place, that the man of gayety never *does* step over the bounds of virtue? Are all those things which go under the name of amusements as perfectly innocent as they are generally represented to be? Is there not one diversion at least (as it is called) and one so predominant in the higher ranks of life, that it has swallowed up almost every other, which is big with the most fatal mischief? A diversion, which far different from the common run of amusements has no foundation in our natural appetites; no charms to captivate the fancy, or the understanding; nothing to make glad the heart of man, to give him a chearful countenance, and refresh him after the cares and fatigues of duty; but runs counter to reason, sense, and nature; defeats all the purposes of amusement; sinks the spirits instead of raising

^b Acts xvii. 28.

them ; sours the temper instead of improving it : and when it is carried to its utmost lengths, takes such entire and absolute possession of the soul, as to shut out every other concern both for God and Man ; extinguishes every generous sentiment ; excites the most malignant passions ; provokes to the most profane expressions ; brings distress, sometimes ruin, upon its wretched votaries, their families, friends, and dependants ; tempts them to use unfair, or mean, or oppressive methods of retrieving their affairs ; and sometimes to conclude the dismal scene by the last fatal act of desperation. I do not say that gaming *always* produces these effects ; or that it is to all persons, in all circumstances, and in all its various degrees, equally pernicious and unlawful. But it has always *a natural tendency* to these effects, it always exposes ourselves and others to great danger, and can never be ranked amongst our innocent amusements. Yet as such it is every day more and more pursued ; nay has even appropriated to itself the name of *play*—for what reason I know not, unless to *play* with our lives and fortunes, with happiness temporal and eternal, be the most delectable of all human enjoyments.

But putting this strange unaccountable passion out of the question ; do not even our most allowable diversions sometimes end in sin, though they may not begin with it ? Does not an immoderate fondness for these trivial things, insensibly weaken
and

and corrupt our hearts, and lead us by imperceptible steps to a temper of mind, and a course of action, essentially wrong? The fact is, a state of neutrality in religion, an insipid mediocrity betwixt vice and virtue, though it is what many would be glad to take up with, is an imaginary state; at least, is very seldom, if ever, to be found in a life of gayety and dissipation. The man who is constantly engaged in the amusements, can scarce ever escape the pollutions, of the world. In his eager pursuits of pleasure, he will be sometimes apt to overshoot the mark, and to go further than he ought, perhaps than he intended. Even they who are most in earnest about their future welfare; who have taken care to fortify their minds with the firmest principles of Religion; who constantly endeavour to keep alive their hopes and fears of futurity; to guard with the utmost vigilance every avenue of the mind, and secure all THE ISSUES OF LIFE^c; even these, I say, are sometimes unable, with all their caution and circumspection to prevent surprize; with all their strength and resolution to withstand the violence of headstrong passions and desires; which often burst through all restraints, and beat down all the barriers that reason and religion had been a long time raising up against them. What then must be the case when all the impressions of religion are by the continual attrition of diversions worn out and effaced; when the mind is stript of

^c Proverbs iv. 23.

all prudential caution ; no guard left upon the imagination ; no check upon the passions ; the natural spring and vigour of the soul impaired, and no supernatural aid to strengthen and support it ? What else can be expected, but that we should fall an easy prey to the weakest invader, and yield ourselves up to the slightest temptation ? WHEN THE UNCLEAN SPIRIT COMETH, HE FINDETH every thing within prepared for his reception, EMPTY, SWEEPED AND GARNISHED ; AND HE TAKETH WITH HIMSELF SEVEN OTHER SPIRITS MORE WICKED THAN HIMSELF ; AND THEY ENTER IN, AND DWELL THERE, AND THE LAST STATE OF THAT MAN IS WORSE THAN THE FIRST^d ; he begins in gayety, and ends in vice.

Let us however take this question up on the most favourable grounds : Let us allow it possible for you to run round for ever in the circle of gayety, without ever once striking into the paths of vice. Is this do you think sufficient for salvation ? If your amusements as effectually choke the good seed as the rankest weeds of vice, can you with any propriety call them innocent ? Do you imagine that God, who is a JEALOUS GOD^e, will bear to be supplanted in your affections by every trifle ; or that he will be content with your not taking up arms against him, though you do him not one fin-

^d Matth. xii. 44, 45.

^e Exod. xx. 5.

gle piece of acceptable service? The utmost you can plead, is a kind of negative merit, the merit of doing neither good nor harm; and what reception that is likely to meet with, you may judge from the answer given to the unprofitable servant who produced his talent wrapped up in a napkin, undiminished indeed but unimproved: O THOU WICKED SERVANT, WHEREFORE GAVEST THOU NOT MY MONEY INTO THE BANK, THAT AT MY COMING I MIGHT HAVE REQUIRED MINE OWN WITH USURY^f? It is not enough merely to abstain from gross crimes. It is not enough to enjoy yourselves in an indolent harmless tranquillity; to divide matters so nicely as to avoid equally the inconveniences of vice, and the fatigues of virtue; to praise religion in words, to love it perhaps in speculation, but to leave the trouble of practising it to others. This languor and inactivity is a kind of lethargy in the soul, which renders it utterly insensible to the life and spirit of religion. Indifference in any good cause is blameable. In religion, in the Christian religion, it is insupportable. It does violence to the first and fundamental principle of that religion. THOU SHALT LOVE THE LORD THY GOD, WITH ALL THY HEART, WITH ALL THY SOUL, WITH ALL THY MIND, AND WITH ALL THY STRENGTH^g. Go now and let your whole heart and soul, and mind, and strength, be engaged in pursuing

^f Luke xix. 23.^g Mark xii. 30.

your amusements, and promoting your pleasures, and then lay claim to the rewards of Christianity.

Happy will it be for you, if you can escape its punishments. The Gospel, I am sure, gives you no grounds to suppose that you shall. Though you bear no EVIL FRUIT, yet if you bear no GOOD you are involved in the sentence of the fig-tree, CUT IT DOWN, WHY CUMBERETH IT THE GROUND^h? To do nothing is in many cases to do a positive wrong, and as such requires a positive punishment. To stand neuter in dangerous commotions of the state, the great Athenian lawgiver declared to be a crime *against* the state; and in like manner the great Christian lawgiver declares; HE THAT IS NOT WITH ME, IS AGAINST ME, AND HE THAT GATHERETH NOT WITH ME, SCATTERETH ABROADⁱ.

Christianity is throughout an *active* religion; it consists not only in ABSTAINING FROM ALL APPEARANCE OF EVIL^k; but IN BEING READY TO EVERY GOOD WORK^l; and if we stop short at the first, we leave the better half of our business undone. Christ himself WENT ABOUT continually DOING GOOD^m; and he has prescribed a variety of positive and practical duties to his disciples, as one of the con-

^h Luke xiii. 7.
^l Tit. iii. 1.

ⁱ Matth. xii. 30.

^m Acts x. 38.

^k 1 Theff. v. 22.

ditions of their salvation; and pressed the performance of these duties upon them, with an earnestness and a force of expression, that may well alarm the thoughtless and the gay, and make them reflect on the extreme danger of their situation. With regard to God we are commanded TO BELIEVE IN HIM, TO FEAR HIM, TO LOVE HIM, TO WORSHIP HIM, TO GIVE HIM THANKS ALWAYS, TO PRAY WITHOUT CEASING, AND WATCH THEREUNTO WITH ALL PERSEVERANCE. With regard to our neighbour, we are TO DO GOOD UNTO ALL MEN, TO BE RICH IN GOOD WORKS, TO BE KIND AND TENDER HEARTED, TO FEED THE HUNGRY, TO CLOATH THE NAKED, TO REMEMBER THEM THAT ARE IN BONDS, TO MINISTER TO THE SICK, TO VISIT THE FATHERLESS AND WIDOWS IN THEIR AFFLICTION. With regard to ourselves we are enjoined TO BE TEMPERATE IN ALL THINGS, TO KEEP UNDER OUR BODIES, and BRING THEM INTO SUBJECTION, TO SET OUR AFFECTIONS ON THINGS ABOVE, TO WATCH AND PRAY LEST WE ENTER INTO TEMPTATION, TO WORK OUT OUR SALVATION WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING, TO USE ALL DILIGENCE TO MAKE OUR CALLING AND ELECTION SUREⁿ. Such and so various are the duties pressed upon us in every page of the scriptures. And is this now a religion to be trifled with? Is it not enough to employ every moment we can spare from the indispensable duties of our station, and the necessary refreshments of Nature;

ⁿ See the New Testament, throughout.

and how then can it be consistent with that incessant hurry and dissipation, which, intent only on providing a succession of worthless amusements and ignoble gratifications, overlooks every precept of reason and revelation ; and supposes that the whole business of life is not to employ time usefully, but to consume it insignificantly ? Can these men seriously imagine that they are all this time WORKING OUT THEIR SALVATION, that they are PRESSING FORWARDS TOWARDS THE MARK FOR THE PRIZE OF THEIR HIGH CALLING^o, that they are every day drawing nearer and nearer to immortal happiness, and that they shall share the crown of glory with them who HAVE BORN THE BURTHEN AND HEAT OF THE DAY^p ? Is eternal life so very small an object, so extremely cheap a purchase, as to require not the least pains to obtain it ? Or is the situation of the rich man represented in scripture to be so perfectly safe and secure, that whilst the rest of mankind are enduring afflictions, struggling with difficulties, subduing their passions, and fighting the good fight with patience ; he, and he only, may neglect all these precautions ; may give up his whole time and thoughts to dress and magnificence, and diversion, and good cheer ; may center his whole care in his own dear person, and make it his sole study to gratify every wish of his heart ; may leave his salvation to take care of itself, and as if he had obtained a promise of Heaven in rever-

^o Phil. iii. 14.

^p Matth. xx. 12.

sion,

sion, think of nothing but present felicity ; and say within himself, SOUL, THOU HAST MUCH GOODS LAID UP FOR MANY YEARS, TAKE THINE EASE, EAT, DRINK, AND BE MERRY¹ ? BE NOT DECEIVED² : This is not virtue ; this is not religion ; this is not Christianity. It is, on the contrary, that very temper of mind, that indolent, soft, luxurious, dream of the soul, for which the rich man in the Gospel was condemned TO LIFT UP HIS EYES IN TORMENTS³ ; and let those who dread his punishment, be warned by his example.

It is then a fatal mistake to suppose, that a life of continual gayety and dissipation, because it is not marked with any notorious crimes, because it does not shock our consciences with palpable guilt, is therefore perfectly innocent. You have by this time seen, I hope, that it is far from being so. You have seen that it naturally leads to, and frequently terminates in, actual vice ; that at the least it so totally unmans and enfeebles the soul, as to render it unfit for the reception of religious truths, incapable of exerting its nobler powers, unable to struggle through the common difficulties, or support the common afflictions, of life ; and leaves neither time nor inclination, nor ability, to perform the most important duties of a man, a social being, and a Christian.

¹ Luke xii. 19.

² 1 Cor. vi. 9.

³ Luke xvi. 23.

The truth is; though diversions may serve very well to quicken a palled appetite, they are much too poignant and high-season'd to be the constant food and nourishment of the soul. They not only destroy our relish for the more plain and simple fare of sobriety and virtue, but lay a foundation for the worst diseases; and though they do not so instantly kill as the deadly poison of vice, yet with a gradual and a fatal certainty, they undermine the vital parts, and sap the constitution.

Beware then of an error, which is the more dangerous, because it is not always perceived, or at least acknowledged, to be an error. And such of you, more especially, as are just setting out in life, full of those high spirits and gay imaginations which youth, and rank, and affluence, naturally inspire; beware of giving way to that feverish thirst of pleasure, to that frivolous turn of mind and levity of conduct, which will render all your great advantages useless, and totally defeat every grand purpose of your creation. Do not imagine that you were born to please yourselves only. Do not entertain that false, that destructive notion, that your wealth and time are all your own; that you may dispose of them exactly as you think fit; may lavish the whole of them on your own pleasures and amusements, without being accountable to any one for the

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appli-

application of them. There is one most assuredly who may, and who has declared that he will, call you to an account, for the use of that leisure and those riches, which he bestowed upon you for far other purposes than that mean ignoble one of meer selfish gratification. There are duties of the last importance owing to your families, your friends, your country, your fellow-creatures, your Creator, which you are bound under the most sacred ties to perform; and whatever calls off your attention from these, does from that moment cease to be innocent. Here then is the precise point at which you ought to stop. You may be LOVERS OF PLEASURE; it is natural, it is reasonable, for you to be so; but you must not be LOVERS OF PLEASURE, MORE THAN LOVERS OF GOD. This is the true line that separates *harmless gayety* from *criminal dissipation*. It is a line drawn by the hand of God himself, and he will never suffer it to be passed with impunity. HE claims on the justest grounds the first place in your hearts. His laws and precepts are to be the first object of your regard. And be assured that by suffering them to be so, you will be no losers even in present felicity. It is a truth demonstrable by reason, and confirmed by invariable experience, that a perpetual round of fashionable gayety, is not the road to real substantial happiness. Ask those who have tried it, and they will all (if they are honest) with one voice declare, that it is not. It is indeed in the very nature of things impossible that

that it should be so. This world is not calculated to afford, the human mind is not formed to bear, a constant succession of new and exquisite delights. To aim therefore at an interrupted unbounded gayety, to make pleasure so necessary to your existence, that you cannot subsist one moment without it, is to convert every thing that is not absolute pleasure into absolute pain, and to lay the foundation of certain misery. Diversions are of too thin and unsubstantial a nature to fill the whole capacity of a rational mind, or to satisfy the cravings of a soul formed for immortality. They must, they do, tire and disgust; you see it every day; you see men flying from one amusement to another; affecting to be happy, yet feeling themselves miserable; fatigued with pursuing their pleasures, yet uneasy without them; growing sick at last of them all, of themselves, and every thing around them; and compelled perhaps at last to have recourse to solitude, without the least provision made for it; without any fund of entertainment within, to render it supportable. From this wretched state it is that religion would preserve you; and the very worst you have to fear from it, is nothing more than such gentle restraints on your gayety, as tend to promote the very end you have in view, the true enjoyment even of the present life. Suffer it then to do you this kind office; and do not look on Christianity in that gloomy light, in which it sometimes perhaps appears to you. Far from being an

enemy to cheerfulness, it is the truest friend to it. That sober and temperate use of diversions which it allows and recommends, is the surest way to preserve their power to please, and your capacity to enjoy them. At the same time, though it forbids excess in our pleasures, yet it multiplies the number of them; and disposes the mind to receive entertainment from a variety of objects and pursuits, which to the gay part of mankind are absolutely flat and insipid. To a body in perfect health, the plainest food is relishing, and to a soul rightly harmonized by religion every thing affords delight. Rural retirement, domestic tranquillity, friendly conversation, literary pursuits, philosophical enquiries, works of genius and imagination; nay even the silent beauties of unadorned nature, a bright day, a still evening, a starry hemisphere, are sources of unadulterated pleasure to those whose taste is not vitiated by criminal indulgences, or debased by trifling ones. And when from these you rise to the still more rational and manly delights of virtue; to that self-congratulation which springs up in the soul from the consciousness of having endeavoured with the assistance of divine grace to fulfil the duties of your station; of having done your utmost to correct your infirmities, to subdue your passions, to improve your understandings, to exalt and purify your affections, to promote the welfare of all within your reach, to love and obey your Maker; then is human happiness

ness wound up to its utmost pitch; and this world has no higher gratifications to bestow.

Try then, you, who are in search of pleasures, try these amongst the rest; try above all others, the pleasures of devotion. Think not that they are nothing more than the visions of a heated imagination. They are real, they are exquisite. They are what thousands have experienced, what thousands still experience, what you yourselves may experience if you please. Acquire only a *taste* for devotion, (as you often do for other things of far less value) in the beginning of life, and it will be your support and comfort through the whole extent of it. It will raise you above all low cares, and little gratifications; it will give dignity and sublimity to your sentiments, inspire you with fortitude in danger, with patience in adversity, with moderation in prosperity, with alacrity in all your undertakings, with watchfulness over your own conduct, with benevolence to all mankind. It will be so far from throwing a damp on your other pleasures, that it will give new life and spirit to them, and make all nature look gay around you. It will be a fresh fund of cheerfulness in store for you, when the vivacity of youth begins to droop; and is the only thing that can fill up that void in the soul which is left in it by every earthly enjoyment. It will not,

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like worldly pleasures, desert you, when you have most need of consolation, in the hours of solitude, of sickness, of old age; but when once its holy flame is thoroughly lighted up in your breasts, instead of becoming more faint and languid as you advance in years, it will grow brighter and stronger every day; will glow with peculiar warmth and lustre, when your dissolution draws near; will disperse the gloom and horrors of a death-bed; will give you a foretaste, and render you worthy to partake, of that **FULNESS OF JOY**, those pure celestial **PLEASURES** which are at **GOD'S RIGHT HAND FOR EVERMORE**.

^c Psal. xvi. 11.

T H E E N D.

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JOHN

like worldly pleasures, but you, when you have need
of consolation, in the hour of tribulation, of all
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in your breast, instead of becoming more faint and languid as
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distraction draws near; will dissipate the gloom and horror
of a death-bed; will give you a foretaste, and render you
worthy to partake of that blessed life, those joys of
eternal pleasures which are in God's right hand for
evermore.

THE END

J O H N **iii.** **19.**

THIS IS THE CONDEMNATION THAT LIGHT IS COME INTO THE WORLD, AND MEN LOVED DARKNESS RATHER THAN LIGHT, BECAUSE THEIR DEEDS WERE EVIL.

WHEN the several parts of the text are reduced to their proper order; they give us the four following distinct propositions.

That light is come into the world.

That men have preferred darkness to this light.

That the reason is because their deeds are evil.

And that the consequence of this choice will be condemnation.

It may be worth our while to bestow a little consideration on each of these particulars.

In this enlighten'd age, it will be thought no paradox to assert that LIGHT IS COME INTO THE WORLD. The position is true in more senses than one; but there is only one that can suit this passage. The light here meant can be no other than

that divine one of revelation which BROUGHT LIFE AND IMMORTALITY^a along with it. The Christian dispensation is constantly and uniformly described in holy writ under this figure, from the time that the first faint glimmerings of it appeared at a distance, till it shone forth in its full lustre and glory under the Gospel. Indeed there seems to be scarce any other image, that could so fitly and adequately represent it tous. It is of the same use to the spiritual, that the light of the sun is to the natural world. It gives life, health, and vigour, to God's new creation; it makes the DAY OF SALVATION^b to dawn upon us; it opens to us the prospect of another and a better life; IT IS A LIGHT TO OUR FEET AND A LANTERN TO OUR PATHS^c, and guides us in the way to happiness and glory.

The next assertion contained in the text, that MEN HAVE PREFERRED DARKNESS TO THIS LIGHT, may seem to require a proof. TO LOVE DARKNESS RATHER THAN LIGHT is so opposite to our nature, so inconsistent with our general manner of proceeding, that it seems at first incredible. If it really is the case, so perverse a choice was never made but in religion. Every other kind of light men catch at with the utmost eagerness. The light of the heavens has been ever esteemed one of the greatest blessings that Providence has bestowed upon us, without which, even life itself would be hardly thought worth

^a 2 Tim. i. 10.

^b 2 Cor. vi. 2.

^c Ps. cxix. 105.

possessing.

possessing. The love of knowledge, that light of the mind, appears in us as early, and operates in us as strongly, as any one principle in our nature ; and in every instance, the human understanding naturally lays hold on every opportunity of information, and opens itself on every side to let in all the light it is capable of receiving.

How then comes it to pass that with a mind thus constituted, thus thirsting after light, men can sometimes bring themselves to do such violence to their nature, as to chuse darkness, in that very point where it is of the utmost importance to have all the light they can possibly get ; where every step must lead to happiness or misery, and every error draw after it the most fatal and lasting consequences ? Yet our Saviour tells us, that this was actually the case in his days, and would God that daily experience did not shew the possibility of it, in our own ! But when we see the various artifices with which revelation is every day assailed ; when we see one man ^a most ingeniously reasoning us out of every ground of certainty, and every criterion of truth ; involving self-evident axioms in obscurity and confusion ; and entangling our understandings in the gloomy intricacies of scholastic subtilty, and metaphysical abstraction : when we see another ^c ; who, after having long amused and poisoned all Europe with his writings, and worn out a fine genius in burlesquing the religion of the God that gave it, is now become a hoary veteran in infi-

^a Hume.

^c Voltaire.

delity ;

delity; and still true to the cause, even whilst he stands on the brink of the grave, seems anxious to give us the very dregs of his doctrine, and to drain out the last drop of his venom before he dies: when we see a third, with the strongest professions of sincerity and good faith, proposing most humbly what he calls his *doubts* and *scruples*, and thereby raising them in the minds of others; extolling one part of Christianity, in order to destroy the rest; retaining its moral precepts, but rejecting its evangelical doctrines and its miraculous proofs; giving an air of speciousness to the wildest singularities by the most exquisite graces of composition; and insidiously undermining the foundations of the Gospel, whilst he pretends to defend it: when I say our adversaries assume such different shapes, and set so many engines at work against us; what else can this mean but to take from us all the sources of religious information, and bring us back again to the darkness and ignorance of our Pagan ancestors? It is to no purpose to tell us here of the *light of nature*. It is an affront to our senses, to offer us that dim taper, in the room of

* Rousseau.

It were most devoutly to be wished, that the same incomparable writer who has lately done such essential service to the cause of religion, by utterly subverting Mr. Hume's uncomfortable and unintelligible system of pyrrhonism, would with the like spirit and success lay open to the world the endless sophisms, mistakes, and misrepresentations, of the other two fashionable Sceptics. See Dr. BEATTIE's *Essay on the nature and immutability of Truth*: Where the reader will find good sense and perspicuity introduced into the abstracted subjects, and a natural, easy, satisfactory train of reasoning, enforced by the most animated and manly eloquence. What may not the world expect from so rare a union of a clear head, a fine imagination, and a heart thoroughly warmed with the love of truth and virtue!

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the SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS^a. Whatever men may talk of the modern improvements of science, the discoveries of philosophy, and the sagacity of human reason, it is to Revelation only we are indebted for all the light we boast of in religion^b. If nature could ever have pointed out to us right principles of belief, and rules of conduct, she might have done it long ago; she had 4000 years to do it in before the coming of Christ. But what little progress was made in this vast space of time; what egregious mistakes were committed, not only in the speculative doctrines of religion, but in some of the most essential points of practical morality, I need not remind you. How comes it then to pass, that this blind guide is at last become so quick-sighted? How comes her eye on a sudden so strong and clear, as to see into the perfections and will of God, to penetrate into the dark regions of futurity, to take in at one view the whole compass of our duty, and the whole extent of our existence? It is plain some friendly hand must have removed the film from her eyes; and what other hand could this be than that gracious beneficent one, which gave eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame; which helped the impotence, and healed the infirmity, of nature, in every instance, in none more than in this? It is in short from the sacred sources of Revelation, that reason drew that light she now enjoys. Let then men walk, if they will be so perverse, BY THIS LESSER

^a Mr. Rousseau himself confesses that the purity of modern Ethics is owing, not to philosophy, but, to the Gospel. *Oeuvres*. Tom. ix. p. 71.

LIGHT¹, which was only intended TO RULE THE NIGHT² of heathenism; but let them be so honest as to confess that it is only a *borrowed*, a *reflected* light; that it owes much the greatest part of its present lustre to that greater, that better light of the Gospel, whose province it is TO GOVERN THE DAY³, and TO LIGHTEN EVERY MAN THAT COMETH INTO THE WORLD⁴.

Let us however suppose for a moment (what can never be proved) that mankind are now much better able to investigate truth and to find out their duty by themselves than they were in former ages; and that reason can give us (the utmost it ever did or can pretend to give) a perfect system of morality. But what will this avail us, unless it could be shown that *man* is also perfect and uncorrupt? A religion that contained nothing more than a perfect system of morality might perhaps suit an Angel; but it is only one part, it is only a subordinate part, of the religion of a man and a sinner. It would be but very poor consolation to a criminal going to execution, to put into his hands a compleat collection of the laws of his country, when the poor wretch perhaps expected a reprieve. It could serve no other purpose than to embitter his agonies, and make him see more clearly the justice of his condemnation. If you chose to do the unhappy man a real service, and to give him any substantial comfort, you must assure him that the offence for which

¹ Gen. i. 16.² Ib.³ Ib.⁴ John i. 9.

he was going to die was forgiven him; that his sentence was reversed; that he would not only be restored to his Prince's favour, but put into a way of preserving it for the future; and that if his conduct afterwards was honest and upright, he should be deemed capable of enjoying the highest honours in his master's kingdom. But no one could tell him this, or at least he would credit no one that did; except he was commissioned and authorized by the Prince himself, to tell him so. He might study the laws in his hands till the very moment of his execution, without ever finding out from them that he should obtain a pardon.

Such precisely was the state of man before Christ came into the world. He had fallen from his original innocence. He was a rebel against God, and obnoxious to his wrath. The sentence of death had passed upon him, and he had no plea to offer to arrest the execution of it. Reason, you say, gives him a perfect rule to walk by. But he has already transgress'd this rule; and if even this transgression were cancell'd, yet if left to himself, he may transgress it again the next moment. He is uneasy under his sentence, he wants forgiveness for the past, assistance for the future; and till you can give him this, it is an insult upon his misery to talk to him of a perfect rule of action. If this be all that reason can give him (and it is really much more than it can give him), he must necessarily have recourse to Revelation. God only knows,

and God only can tell, whether he *will* forgive, and upon what *terms* he will forgive the offences done against him; what mode of worship he requires; what helps he will afford us; and what condition he will place us in hereafter. All this God actually has told us in the Gospel. It was to tell us this, He sent his son into the world, whose mission was confirmed by the highest authority, by signs from Heaven, and miracles on earth; whose life and doctrine are delivered down to us by the most unexceptionable witnesses, who sealed their testimony with their blood; who were too curious and incredulous to be themselves imposed upon, too honest and sincere, too plain and artless, to impose upon others.

What then can be the reason that men still refuse to see, and persist in **LOVING DARKNESS RATHER THAN LIGHT**? They will tell you perhaps that it is because the Scripture is full of incredible mysteries*, but our Saviour tells you, and he tells you

* In answer to this it has been said, that the mysteries to which Deists object, are not those that have any real existence in Scripture, but those only that are taught in *systematical formularies of faith*: which being an assertion without proof, a contrary assertion would be a sufficient reply to it. But let the Deists themselves (who must be allowed to understand their own meaning best) decide the point. THE GOSPEL (says the famous *Vicaire Savoyard*) is full of incredible things, of things which are repugnant to reason, and which it is impossible for any man of sense to conceive or to admit*.—From this and a hundred other passages of the same kind in the works of Deistical writers, it is plain that their quarrel is with the mysteries which they find not merely in formularies of faith, but in Scripture itself.

* Oeuvres de *Voltaire*, vol. 3. p. 93.

much

much truer, that it is BECAUSE THEIR DEEDS ARE EVIL. The mysteries of the Gospel can be no real objection to any man that considers what mysteries occur, and what insuperable objections may be started in almost every branch of human knowledge; and how often we are obliged in our most important temporal concerns to decide and to act upon evidence, encumbered with far greater difficulties than any that are to be found in Scripture. If we can admit no religion that is not free from mystery, we must, I doubt, be content without any religion at all. Even the religion of nature itself, the whole constitution both of the natural and moral world, is full of mystery^p; and the greatest mystery of all would be, if, with so many irresistible marks of truth, Christianity should at last prove false. It is not then because the Gospel has *too little* light for these men that they reject it, but because it has *too much*. FOR EVERY ONE THAT DOTETH EVIL HATETH THE LIGHT, NEITHER COMETH TO THE LIGHT, LEST HIS DEEDS SHOULD BE REPROVED^q. The light of Revelation is too prying and inquisitive for such an one. It discovers certain things which he could wish to conceal from all the world, and if possible from himself. Nor is this all, it not only reveals, but it reproves, them. It strikes him with an evidence he cannot bear; an evidence not only of its own truth, but of his guilt

^p Vide *Voltaire. Questions sur l'Encyclopedie. V. i. p. 190.*

Rousseau. T. 7. p. 176. & T. 8. p. 17, 26. 32, 49.—12^o 1762. Francfort.

^q John iii. 20.

and depravity. The Gospel does indeed offend him; but it is not his understanding, it is his conscience that is shocked; he could easily credit what it requires him to believe; but he cannot, or rather he will not, practise what it commands him to do.

It is plain that such a man cannot possibly admit a Revelation that condemns him; and it is as plain that the man of virtue cannot spurn the hand that is graciously stretched out to reward him. If he is a *truly* virtuous man, that is one who sincerely labours to know his duty, and sincerely intends to perform it, he cannot but wish for more light to guide him in the investigation, more assistance to support him in the discharge of it, more happiness to crown his perseverance in it, than bare reason alone can afford him. This is what all the best and wisest Heathens most ardently desired, what nature has been continually looking out for with the utmost earnestness of expectation. When with a mind thus disposed he sits down to examine the Gospel, suggest to me the least shadow of a reason why he should reject it. He finds in it a religion pure, holy, and benevolent, as the God that gave it. He finds not only its moral precepts, but even its sublimest mysteries, calculated to promote internal sanctity, vital piety, universal philanthropy. He finds it throughout so great and noble, so congenial to the finest feelings, and most generous sentiments of his soul; that he cannot but wish it may be true; and never yet, I

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believe,

believe, did any good man wish it to be true, but he actually found it so. He sees in it every expectation of nature answered, every infirmity supported, every want supplied, every terror dissipated, every hope confirmed; nay he sees that God has done exceeding abundantly above all that he could either ask or think, that he has given him, (what reason could not even have the idea of,) eternal happiness in a life to come. Will this man LOVE DARKNESS RATHER THAN THAT LIGHT? Will he chuse to pursue virtue, with much pains, little success, and no other WAGES than DEATH; or to be led to her through a safe and easy path by an infallible guide, who does not desire him to **SERVE GOD FOR NOTHING?**

Let me not however be understood to assert, or to represent the text as asserting, that *all* unbelievers are without exception absolutely bad men. There are some no doubt who lead, what is called, good moral lives. Yet if you examine even these very strictly, you will, I am persuaded, seldom find that their virtue is so pure, so uniform, so extensive, so compleat in all the several branches of duty, as that of a truly devout Christian. And observe too, that men may reject the Gospel, not only because they are dissolute in their conduct, but for various other reasons: because, perhaps they are too busy or too idle to examine carefully into the truth; because like **GAULIUS** THEY CARE FOR NONE OF THESE THINGS, and like him, DRIVE THEM AWAY with contempt FROM THE JUDGEMENT-

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SEAT of their own mind; because they give themselves up to a warm lively imagination; and are impatient to shew that they have more depth of thought, more freedom of spirit, and elevation of mind, than the rest of the world; because in fine they are ambitious to figure at the head of a sect, to enjoy the delightful triumph of beating down long-established opinions, and erecting upon their ruins a little favourite system of their own. Now all these causes of infidelity, though less culpable than downright profligacy, are yet evidently great faults, and indicate more or less a depraved turn of mind; and from immoralities of *this* kind at least scarce any sceptics are entirely free. Or admit, that some are; yet these instances are confessedly very rare; and a prudent man would no more chuse to embark his morality on so precarious a bottom, than he would venture to walk in the dark amidst rocks and precipices, because some perhaps have done it without receiving any harm. In general therefore, the ground of unbelief laid down by our Saviour in the text, is undoubtedly a true one; and if a man shuns the light it is a certain sign that his deeds are, in some sense or other, in a greater or a less degree, evil, and consequently his condemnation just.

Yet how can this be, you will perhaps say? Can God punish his creatures for walking by that light which he himself has set

Acts xviii. 16.

up

up in their own minds, though he has at the same time perhaps revealed a fuller light from Heaven : ? Most certainly he can ; for the very same reason that a Prince might punish his subjects for acting by the law of nature ; instead of governing themselves by the civil laws of the land. It is not a matter of indifference, whether you embrace Christianity or not. Though reason could answer all the purposes of Revelation (as in truth it can answer none) yet you are not at liberty to make it your sole guide if there be such a thing as a true Revelation. We are the subjects of the Almighty ; and whether we will acknowledge it or not, we live, and cannot *but* live, under his government. His will is the law of his kingdom. If he has made no express declaration of his will, we must collect it as well as we can from what we know of his nature and our own. But if he has expressly declared his will, *that* is the law we are to be governed by. We may indeed refuse to be governed by it ; but it is at our peril if we do ; for if it proves to be a *true* declaration of his will, to reject it is **REBELLION**.

But to reject or receive it, you may alledge, is not a thing in your own power. Belief depends not on your will but your understanding. And will the righteous judge of the earth condemn

• De quoi puis-je être coupable en servant Dieu selon les Lumières qu'il donne à mon esprit, & selon les sentimens qu'il inspire à mon cœur ? *Rousseau, T. 2. p. 67.*

you

you for want of understanding? No; but he may and will condemn you for the *wrong conduct* of your understanding. It is not indeed in your power to believe whatever you please, whether credible or incredible; but it is in your power to consider thoroughly, whether a supposed incredibility be real or only apparent. It is in your power to bestow a greater or less degree of attention on the evidence before you. It is in your power to examine it with an earnest desire to find out the truth, and a firm resolution to embrace it wherever you do find it; or on the contrary, to bring with you a heart full of incorrigible depravity or invincible prepossessions. Have you then truly and honestly done every thing that is confessedly in your power, towards forming a right judgement of Revelation? Have you ever laid before yourself in one view the whole collective evidence of Christianity: the amazing consistence, harmony, and connection, of all its various parts; the long chain of prophecies undeniably completed in it; the astonishing and well-attested miracles that attended it; the perfect sanctity of its author; the purity of its precepts; the sublimity of its doctrines; the amazing rapidity of its progress; the illustrious company of confessors, saints, and martyrs, who died to confirm its truth: together with an infinite number of collateral proofs and subordinate circumstances, all concurring to

Est-ce un crime de croire, ou de ne pas croire? Est-ce un crime de n'avoir pas su bien argumenter? *Roussseau, T. 6. p. 305.*

form

form such a body of evidence, as no other truth in the world can shew; such as must necessarily bear down by its own weight and magnitude, all trivial objections to particular parts? Surely these things are not trifles; surely they at least demand seriousness and attention. Have you then done the Gospel this common piece of justice? Have you ever sat down to consider it with impartiality and candour; without any favourite vice or early prejudice, without any fondness for applause, or novelty, or refinement, to mislead you? Have you examined it with the same care and diligence, that you would examine a title to an estate? Have you enquired for proper books? Have you read the defences of Revelation as well as the objections to it? Have you in difficult points applied for the opinion of wise and learned friends; just as you would consult the ablest lawyers where your property was concerned, or the most skilful physicians when your life was at stake? If you can truly say, that you have done all these things; if you have faithfully bestowed on these enquiries, all the leisure and abilities you are master of, and called in every help within your reach, there is little danger of any material doubts remaining upon your mind. But if after all there should—Be not afraid—Trust in God and **BE AT PEACE**. You are in the hands of a gracious Master, who will not require more of you than you are able to perform. To the modest, the humble, the diligent, the virtuous enquirer; who labours after conviction, but cannot thoroughly arrive at it; who

never attempts or wishes to infuse his scruples into others; who earnestly strives, who fervently prays, for more light and strength; crying out with all the passionate sincerity of an honest heart, LORD, I BELIEVE, HELP THOU MINE UNBELIEF^{*}; to him every equitable allowance will undoubtedly be made, every instance of compassionate tenderness be shown. FOR LIKE AS A FATHER PITIETH HIS OWN CHILDREN, EVEN SO IS THE LORD MERCIFUL TO THEM THAT FEAR HIM[†]. But to them who neither *fear* nor *regard* him—To the bold unbelieving libertine, who is against the Gospel, because the Gospel is against him; to the man of pride and paradox, who burns to distinguish himself from the vulgar by the novelty of his opinions, and would disdain to follow the common herd of mankind, even though he knew they were leading him to Heaven; to the subtle minute philosopher who fairly refines away every dictate of common sense, and is lost in the dark profound of his own wretched sophistry; to the buffoon who laughs and takes pains to make all the world laugh at every thing serious and sacred; to the indolent, negligent, superficial, free-thinker, who reads a little, takes for granted a great deal, and understands nothing thoroughly; to the man of pleasure and amusement, who treats all these things with a giddy, wanton, contemptuous, levity; and thinks that the whole fabric of Revelation may be overturned, by a silly cavil, or a profane jest, thrown out in the gay moments

^{*} Mark ix. 24.

[†] Ps. ciii. 13.

of convivial mirth—To these I say, and all like these, the Almighty will one day most assuredly show, that his gracious offers of Salvation are not to be despised, and trampled upon, and ridiculed with impunity.

Consider then, you, who reject the Gospel (if any such be here) consider, I entreat you, on what grounds you reject it; and think a little seriously on these things once more in your lives, before you resolve never to think again. Ask your own hearts whether you are *really*, what perhaps you profess to be, unbelievers on conviction, or whether you have taken up your infidelity, as some do their faith, upon trust. It becomes not us to judge you uncharitably; but indeed it becomes you to examine yourselves very strictly. You may easily deceive the world; you may, if you please, deceive yourselves; but God you cannot deceive. He, to whom all hearts are open as the day, he knows whether you are conscientious and honest doubters, or careless, prejudiced, profane despisers, of his word. IT IS A SMALL THING FOR YOU TO BE JUDGED OF MAN'S JUDGEMENT; HE THAT JUDGETH YOU IS THE LORD'; and by the unerring rules of his justice you must finally stand or fall. Think then whether you can face that justice without dismay; whether you can boldly plead before the tribunal of Christ the sincerity of your unbelief as a bar to your condemnation. That plea may possibly

* 1 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

in *some* cases be a good one. God grant it may in yours ! But remember this one thing ; that you stake your own souls upon the truth of it.

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